

Design and Heritage Annual Report

D and H, one of the Guildford Society's four "knowledge" groups, is tasked as the title implies with upholding standards of design and safeguarding Guildford's amazing built - and natural - heritage. Its current members are Trevor Brook, Gillian Cameron, Auriol Earl, Pat Grayburn, Roy Hogben, Michael Jeffery (interim Chairman), Liz Markwell who has a special role in coordinating the Annual Architecture Lecture, Rosemary Napp who has undertaken on the role of Minute Secretary, Doug Scott and Marilyn Spier. Robin Stannard's special expertise in our built heritage is called on when especially relevant.

Last year, D&H worked with the other Groups to prepare the Society's response to the consultation on the Local Plan.

As mentioned in our October report, the Society's Position papers cover subjects including enhancing the riverside, the town's approaches, our residential heritage, and our historic High Street. That on "Good design - eight points to help ensure good design and future heritage creation" refers to national policies, including that which says Local Authorities should have local design review arrangements in place. We have offered these papers to the newly appointed GBC officer - Joris van der Starre - who is commissioned with developing GBC's own Design Guide.

We're were pleased when GBC appointed an "independent" advisory panel (paid by the developer) to review and advise on the design of major projects. We have been trying to ensure, so far without success, that such advice includes local environmental awareness besides that from professional "experts" - something the Guildford Society with its eighty years as civic guardian and watchdog is well able to offer. Perhaps this year's Annual Architecture Lecture - the annual "town and gown" event hosted by the University (see elsewhere for details) - will offer an opportunity to re-open the discussion, as our lecturer is the Director of "Design South East", the organisation appointed by the Borough to provide the service.

There are some successful outcomes to report, however. One of course is the completion of the relaying of the High Street granite setts, GBC and SCC having agreed to share the cost. Another is the listing of Dapdune Cottage. Sadly the adjacent Dapdune farmhouse had deteriorated beyond repair, but the Cottage might form a part of a facility in a hoped-for riverside walk.

Bargate stone is a feature of many buildings and walls in and around Guildford. Sadly many of these are suffering from erosion and potential collapse. D&H is therefore working to alert those responsible to the problem and advise the need for careful repair with lime based mortar. Other features at risk, and in fact already suffering desecration at the hands of new owners, are the ancient hedgerows and verges, along our historic Green Lanes. We are seeking meetings with GBCV and the Loseley Estate to discuss reversing the changes. We are backing St Martha's Parish Council in its' bid to retain the former Chilworth gunpowder works' West Lodge as, possibly, a visitor centre for that delightful stream-side "factory" site. GBC are reconsidering their intention to sell it off.

This year no Design Awards will be offered as we take turn-and-turn-about with GBC, whose Guildford Design Awards 2017 will be made in the autumn. It was "our" year in 2016, but no worthy contenders were identified. However, there is a possibility that the William and Sylvia Crabtree Award - for a very special contribution to the Guildford environment - may find a suitable claimant.

An activity originally initiated by the Society and now shared with the Borough Council is to promote the town's Heritage Open Days each September. Last year Guildford maintained its record in offering amongst the highest number of accessible premises and events in the country, though footfall was down a little, probably due to the unseasonable weather. This year, every member can help in promoting - and possible learning - some of our fascinating history. Two hours as a steward at one of the town's treasures are so worthwhile and enjoyable - please consider participating.

Michael Jeffery